

Michaud Praises Federal Assistance for Maine Ice Storm Recovery

Friday, January 09 2009

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud issued the following statement on the announcement that more Maine counties will be eligible for federal disaster assistance. Michaud previously joined Senator Snowe and Collins in sending a letter to the President urging him to support Governor John Baldacci's request to have a major disaster declared for seven counties in Maine, making them eligible for additional federal assistance following storms occurring between December 11 and 29, 2008. The severe winter storms resulted in icing, severe winds, snow, and coastal flooding in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and York Counties

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud issued the following statement on the announcement that more Maine counties will be eligible for federal disaster assistance. Michaud previously joined Senator Snowe and Collins in sending a letter to the President urging him to support Governor John Baldacci's request to have a major disaster declared for seven counties in Maine, making them eligible for additional federal assistance following storms occurring between December 11 and 29, 2008. The severe winter storms resulted in icing, severe winds, snow, and coastal flooding in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and York Counties.

“This availability of federal funding is very welcome news,” said Michaud. “The damage in Maine requires the full support of the federal government, especially during these difficult economic times. I joined with Senators Snowe and Collins in strongly urging the President to approve the request for federal disaster assistance. The funding made available will help relieve the burden on our local communities in the rebuilding process.”

The disaster declaration allows State and local governments to be reimbursed by the Federal government for up to 75 percent of costs related to damages of public infrastructure from the storms.

A full text of the letter sent is below:

January 2, 2009

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States

1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to express support for a request that Governor John Baldacci submitted for federal disaster assistance on behalf of Androscoggin, Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and York Counties in the State of Maine, as a result of a severe winter storm, significant icing, high winds, blowing and drifting snow and coastal flooding which impacted the State from December 11, 2008 through December 29, 2008.

According to the National Weather Service, this severe weather began with a major winter storm that brought a mixture of snow, sleet, and freezing rain to Maine from the morning of December 11th to the morning of December 12th. Following this initial storm, recovery and restoration efforts were hindered by additional winter weather events that passed through the State. In the following days, the weather pattern continued to result in precipitation in the form of snow, sleet, and freezing rain. The severe weather produced significant ice accretion on trees and wires and that caused branches to snap and bring down power lines throughout the region. Thus, hundreds of thousands of utility customers

lost power during the incident period, and some customers were without power for more than a week. Indeed, during the incident period, 44% of the State lost power, including the metropolitan areas of Portland and South Portland. The oil terminals in South Portland were without power, unable to supply fuel oil and gasoline to distributors. Ferries were closed due to lack of power at terminals. Phone service was sporadically interrupted in many locations due to failing batteries or generators, including the loss of telephone service for entire island of Islesboro, creating a dangerous communications blackout for that isolated community. The State's Department of Health and Human Services activated their crisis plan on December 12th in order to reach out to the vulnerable individuals and families to ensure their emergency needs were met. The American Red Cross and community volunteers opened more than 40 shelters and warming centers. At the same time, Maine could not rely on its neighboring states for assistance with the recovery since those states were also experiencing the consequences of this severe weather.

On December 14, 2008, the Governor requested a federal emergency declaration to assist with the ongoing emergency response in the midst of this incident period. We supported this request, and we appreciate that you granted this request promptly on December 15, 2008. The Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) teams initial estimate for public damage for the affected areas is \$4,231,955 or \$3.32 per capita statewide. The Governor has determined that this event is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is "beyond the capabilities of the State and the affected local governments" and has sought Public Assistance under the Stafford Act for these seven counties. State and local budgets in Maine have already been exhausted by the convergent effects of a nationwide recession, crippling fuel costs early this year, six major disasters since May of 2006, and a record snow year in 2007-2008, for which no federal assistance was received.

We urge you to give expeditious consideration and approval of the Governor's request that you declare a major disaster for Androscoggin, Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and York Counties.

Sincerely,

Olympia J. Snowe Susan M. Collins Mike Michaud

United States Senator United States Senator U.S. House of Representatives

###